

## **2. AN OVERVIEW OF THE BENEFITS, CAPABILITIES, AND FEATURES OF SACWIS**

This chapter is presented to provide:

- an overview of the Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS) Prototype Project; and
- a description of the capabilities and features of the SACWIS Prototype through an understanding of the impact it can have on service provision and management.

### **2.1 AN OVERVIEW OF THE SACWIS PROTOTYPE PROJECT**

The primary purposes of the SACWIS Prototype Project are to:

- develop a broadly applicable, automated information system which will track the progress of children and youth in public and private child welfare services agencies; and
- provide technical assistance to assist States in the planning, design, development and installation of a SACWIS.

With respect to the former, the SACWIS Prototype will be designed to address in a flexible and adaptable way peculiar problems and needs that child welfare professionals face at all organizational levels. It will function as a computer-supported case management system that will enhance the opportunities for children to receive truly appropriate and effective attention by facilitating policy development, case and program planning, and resource development.

With respect to the latter, the project will assist States by: conducting a review and synthesis of relevant child welfare services information system models; providing guidance on SACWIS to States through workshops and conferences; establishing a SACWIS Prototype Technical Assistance Group (S-TAG) with officials from 12 States; finalizing the functional requirements for a model child welfare system with effective case management and reporting capability; developing the SACWIS Prototype information system to serve as a national model; and

providing other forms of technical assistance, such as the operation of bulletin board and clearinghouse functions.

## **2.2 SACWIS OBJECTIVES**

The SACWIS design efforts have focused on achieving the following objectives:

- to deliver services to children and their families more effectively and promptly;
- to facilitate interagency coordination;
- to address the essential need to develop better shared information about each child who is separated from his/her family;
- to apply information technology to the needs of children in an intelligent and thoughtful way;
- to respond to local, State, and Federal information and reporting requirements with the most up-to-date aggregate and case-level reports; and
- to be cost-effective.

## **2.3 SACWIS DESIGN FEATURES**

The system is designed with the following characteristics:

- Respond to requirements of all participating organizational units;
- Provide maximum transferability. The system is adapted easily to different data processing environments, is interfaced with other relevant applications, and is adapted easily to changes in reporting requirements;
- Include basic intake data, plus a record of the child's progress;
- Maintain a resource directory to indicate available service providers by geographic area, by service, etc;
- Provide for the careful and full protection of all clients' rights to privacy and confidentiality through effective internal and external security controls

that meet or exceed all legal requirements and official regulations on the subject;

- Allow generated information to be selective in nature and allow reports to be output on an "as needed" basis through the use of a modular, and on-line, reporting methodology;
- Provide a report structure that satisfies three basic levels of information needs, those of:
  1. the agency administrator;
  2. the casework supervisor; and
  3. the caseworker.

## **2.4 BENEFITS FROM SACWIS**

For the worker, SACWIS:

- assists in establishing viable service plans and employing all available services effectively;
- helps achieve plans by keeping the status of each child visible and current;
- provides automatic reminders of review dates and advance notice of scheduled court hearings,
- provides the ability to obtain client identification data, previous client contact information, and data on service providers and their services;
- automatically produces many routine and official reports required by State or Federal statutes and regulations;
- provides automated support for resource management and adoption services;
- makes it easier to transfer a child from one caseworker to another;
- demonstrates more clearly the different intensity of work required for each and every case;

- confirms the acceptance of case transfers or requests for additional information;
- eliminates the need to write manually any information already known to the computer; and
- provides a simple set of the most critical information so that the worker is not overwhelmed with irrelevant and incomprehensible data

For the supervisor, SACWIS:

- highlights problem areas, such as cases that are unassigned or differences in process time between two areas;
- provides a short reference to all cases assigned (which is impossible when the entry point is a long bulky narrative in manual files);
- permits faster and more detailed analysis of caseloads and progress; and
- provides a comprehensive picture of case distribution among workers.

For administrators and managers, SACWIS:

- provides collective service facts to advocate and plan for improvements in resource allocations, legal procedures, and communitywide planning for children's needs;
- provides factually based arguments to present to the executive and legislative bodies which allocate resources;
- provides meaningful statistical reports that record aggregate client movement data and types of services rendered, as well as case outcomes to help evaluate the impact agencies have on improving the quality of life for their clients;
- improves coordination between those agencies responsible for helping children and their families;
- identifies trends in demographic flows and service delivery;
- identifies bottlenecks in the service delivery process;

- gives more attention to programs which are successful; and
- improves the cost effectiveness of service delivery.

For the client, SACWIS:

- increases the client's visibility;
- aids in locating the most appropriate service agencies in and beyond the unit and community agency;
- supports the client's needs by promoting timely planning;
- tracks and monitors child status in terms of current whereabouts and progress;
- monitors status and progress of a child through the adoption process;
- prevents the child from getting "lost" because the worker is regularly reminded of his/her presence; and
- decreases ambiguity and "waiting around" days.

How these benefits will be achieved are discussed in the next two chapters.